

From : Neil Reid
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Subject : Charging for access to the mountains?

On a recent trip to the Cairngorms I was appalled to find that the National Trust for Scotland had installed pay-and-display parking meters in the Linn of Dee car park. In one fell swoop the NTS - holding the land in trust for the people of Scotland - has done what none of the previous private landlords dared try: charging for access to the mountains.

It claims justification for the charge by saying the money goes for upkeep of the car park and support for its conservation work on the Mar Lodge Estate. In fact, as it admits itself, the car park was paid for by Scottish Natural Heritage and grants from the EU. Upkeep is minimal.

As for its work on the estate: So far its policy on footpaths is inconsistent and highly questionable. While work to correct erosion on some stretches of path was necessary, other sections which displayed no erosion have been renewed with the currently in-vogue bright red grit paths which are visible from miles off. Other sections which very obviously need work have been ignored. (And I have personal experience of these paths over a period of some 35 years.)

The climbing and walking world is also rife with rumours that long-term plans are to remove all the bothies in the area, despite their integral role in Scotland's climbing heritage. Neither of these policies - indiscriminate path meddling or bothy removal - are ones which I wish to support, and reaction to the NTS's past mismanagement of Glen Coe suggests I am not alone.

I and many others look on the mountains as our heritage and birthright, despite attempts at obstruction from landlords. I do not think I have abused that right and I have no intention of helping fund a body whose record with mountain properties is worse than my own.

As a footnote, since these meters were not there several weeks ago I assume national park status has streamlined the process of obtaining planning permission for modern intrusions into this protected area.

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